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**Title:** A Sociohistorical View of Cultural Policies

**Year:** 2007

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

Sokka, S. (2007). A Sociohistorical View of Cultural Policies. Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidskrift, 10(2), 60-81.

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## A Sociohistorical View of Cultural Policies

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### ABSTRACT

There is a need to articulate the theoretical basis for the historical orientation in cultural policy research. In this article I will delineate a theoretical frame *in which various aspects of politics are taken into account in relation to research on cultural policy histories*. My thesis will be based comprised of the following three components: (1) the contingency of human action; (2) the public nature of political action, and (3) culture as a realized signifying system. Another aim is to illustrate the importance of carrying out historical research that links empirical data and theoretical research in order to successfully expound the histories of cultural policies. Furthermore, I will argue that by explicating the potentially changing nature of culture and its relation to action, it is possible to disentangle the division between the idiographic and nomothetic research -orientations.

### Introduction

The development of *public cultural policy instruments* has often been thought of as key factor of research on the history of cultural policies (e.g., in the histories of ministries; research on the development of certain instruments within a policy). Indeed, the research of the internal developments *within certain policies* is of utmost importance in the study of cultural policy. However, due to the development of reflective historiography and the increasing interest in cultural and historical questions within the social sciences (e.g., Ago 2004; Bryant 1994; Bryant 2000; Cerutti 2004; Cochran 1994; Griffin 1995; Iggers 1997; Iggers 2000; Ikegami 2005; Ruonavaara 2006; Saari 2005; Torstendahl 2000; Wallerstein 2000a & 2000b), it is becoming increasingly important to pay closer attention to the theoretical perspectives, which are able shed light on how policies are constructed in a given place and time.

Today, one of the most significant discussions in the study of cultural policy is the relationship between 'culture' and 'policy' (see Bennett 1999; Cunningham 1991; McGuigan 2003; McGuigan 2004). Yet, to date, the discussion surrounding the concepts of culture and politics in relation to the historical study of cultural policy has been carried out primarily in the context of national sector policies. As a result, there has not been enough attention paid to the *epistemological and theoretical questions* related to the nature and scope of the study of cultural policy histories.

This article aims to theoretically examine the prerequisites of the historical study of cultural policy and to consider one possible way of reaching beyond the mere description of policy implementations in research. Another aim is to discuss the epistemological questions surrounding historical knowledge and the role of the theories which frame - both implicitly and explicitly - each and every scientific study. In this article, I suggest that it is necessary to conduct historical research which relates empirical data and theoretical research to one another, and, subsequently, to alleviate the division between idiographic (individualizing) and nomothetic (generalizing)<sup>1</sup> research.

The main issues addressed in the three parts of this article are: I) the relationship between historiography and the social sciences, II) the roles (from the viewpoint of cultural policy studies) of politics, public sphere and culture in bridging historiography and the social sciences, and III) based on chapters I and II, the introduction of a feasible model for the historical study of cultural policy. This article will rely on the analysis of ‘politics’ presented by Palonen (2003a) and the definition of ‘culture’ put forth by Williams (1983), and will make reference to some of the previous discussions of the public sphere in relation to culture, politics and cultural policy.

## I) Historiography, social sciences and culture

Over the past 30-odd years, there has been a steady increase in questions concerning the role of culture in the development of societies within historiography and the social sciences. As a result, scientists have recently significantly increased the link between history and the social sciences.

### The history of historiography

The reflectivity of historiography towards its own presumptions has been a recurrent theme in the study of historiography since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 20<sup>th</sup> century on, many historians have presented perspectives which *assign a more central role to culture than before*. As a consequence, there has been a kind of “rephrasing” of those questions that consider the political and social status quo somewhat critically. (see Iggers 2005, 473–476; Cerutti 2004, 28–29; Ago 2004, 42–43.) This, too, should be a factor in the historical study of cultural policies.

In Western societies, the origin of the paradigm of scientific historical research lies in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, where the history of state emerged as a dominant area of research as historiography developed closely alongside the rising nation-state. There were already disputes surrounding the scope of history as a *Wissenschaft* in the 1890s. The main controversy was related to the question of which sources were suitable and acceptable with regard to the scientific study of history. There are two opposing camps in this *Methodenstreit*: one was primarily interested in the development of the political state (and the state led political sphere); the other (most clearly associated with Karl Lamprecht) stressed the significance of going beyond political history and introducing culture and society with respect to the history of state. Despite the challenges, the strong connection between historiography and the state remained strong for decades. However, the controversy over acceptable sources also endured: the role of the nation-state in historical

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<sup>1</sup> Or, nomothetic as scientific / scientific and idiographic as hermeneutic / humanistic (Wallerstein 2000b, 30).

studies seemed to decrease over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of new approaches like the *Annalists*-school, and, later, new cultural history and micro-history. (Iggers 1997, 23–30; Iggers 2005, 469–476.)

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the influence of German scholarship was strong both in and beyond Europe. Although developed in Germany, *the national frame of study* was the dominant mode of carrying out historiographical studies throughout the Western world, including Finland (e.g., Mylly 1997). As a result, the philosophy of history mostly concentrated on the *character of historical sources* (often characteristically national) as opposed to questioning the relationship between historiography and the social sciences. However, over the past 20-30 years, other disciplines have also shaped and influenced the focus of historical studies. Scientific historiography currently uses a more diverse rank of sources than before, and the self-reflexivity of history as a science has increased since the beginning of the reflective study on the history of historiography, which began in earnest in the 1980s (Haapala 1997, 15–22). Nowadays, it is becoming increasingly common to seek explicated theoretical frameworks within which to carry out historical studies (e.g., Kivimäki 2001, 10–11).

The developments in the other Nordic countries have been similar to those in the Finnish case. The first Nordic conference on methods in history was organized in 1965. The main themes of the conferences have been indicative of the development of historiography and the shifts in the focus of research in the field: in the late 1960s, there was a great deal of interest in the methods of social history (cf. quantitative research in sociology); in the mid 1970s, Marxist theories of society (historical materialism) gained attention; and in the 1980s, new views - such as, e.g., the histories of mentalities, the history of society, and eventually also women's history and the histories of minorities - were added to the agenda. All in all, as Torstendahl puts it: "There have been important theoretical impulses of different character to historians in the last three decades." As a result, history has become a field of changing and gradually widening content. (Torstendahl 2000, 7–26.) From this perspective, the work done by such theorists as, e.g., Weber, Elias, Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault, has also proved important to historians.

### **Historical sociology**

As in historiography, new themes such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity have also stimulated new interest in the relationship between politics, culture and identities in sociological research. As a consequence, many sociologists have been engaging in research in which culture plays a significant role (Ikegami 2005, 18; Griffin 1995, 1249).

The *Methodenstreit* which took place in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany was not just a quarrel over the most relevant sources for historical research, it was also philosophically significant. Referring to Wilhelm Windelband, the critics of Lamprecht stressed the distinction that was seen between the individualizing concepts of the human sciences and the generalizing concepts of the natural sciences. Others, conversely, emphasized that history should focus on both individual and collective phenomena and that the latter require abstract, analytical concepts in order to be understood. Max Weber, for one, emphasized this view. (Iggers 1997, 36–38.) However, the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic methodologies has caused disputes ever since – most notably between the preconceived research orientations characteristic of history on the one hand, and the (historical study in) social sciences on the other (e.g., Bryant 1994).

Because of the developments which took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, history was supposed to deal with what had occurred in the past and sociology (together with political sciences and economics<sup>2</sup>) was limited to matters related to the present (Wallerstein 1998, 74–78). This division also shaped research questions. In addition, after WWII, the influence of American sociology was strong in Europe: instead of studying social change, sociological research was concerned with the Parsonsian investigation of social systems without much reference to the temporally bound logics of particular social and cultural configurations. In fact, from the beginning, US sociologists were less concerned with history than the European classics. This led, e.g., to the disregard for the role of time and (potential) conflict in the development of society, which also caused scholars to lose sight of the agents / agencies lurking behind these changes. (Clark 1959; Ikegami 2005, 16–18; Adams et al. 2005, 4–7.)

The interest in historical questions in the social sciences has been rekindled since the decline of “positivist paradigm” and structural functionalism in sociology and the upheaval of the criticism aimed at modernization theories.<sup>3</sup> Since the 1990s, it can be said that history has had a greater influence in [American] sociology than ever before (Griffin 1995, 1247). The same phenomenon can be seen, for instance, in Finland: the role of history is becoming increasingly relevant in the social sciences, and there has even been talk of a “historical turn” within the social sciences (see *Historiallinen käänne* 2006). The ascent of historical questions in the social sciences is linked to the increased interest in culture. As Griffin (1995, 1247) has formulated it: “...history’s complexities, contingencies, exceptions, and ironies must be preserved ... this is true whether the analytic intent is to explain what happened in history and why it happened as it did, or to view history as an interpretative lens through which we may perceive cultural meaning, the creation of cultural icons and myths, and the institutionalization and expression of collective memory.”

The role of culture in bridging the gaps between history and the social sciences is demonstrated in **Figure 1** (p. 5): since the linguistic turn<sup>4</sup>, the increased interest in culture has “forced” researchers to broaden their view in studying the histories of societies. I suggest that studying the role of culture in societies cannot be carried out without taking both the generalizing and individualizing aspects into account. As Immanuel Wallerstein (2000a, 306–307) has stated: “... we need to erase the distinction between past and present, between concrete historical analysis and abstract social science theorizing (or generalizing). All of our work, not merely some of it, ought to be simultaneously historical and particular, on one hand, and nomothetic and universalizing, on the other.”

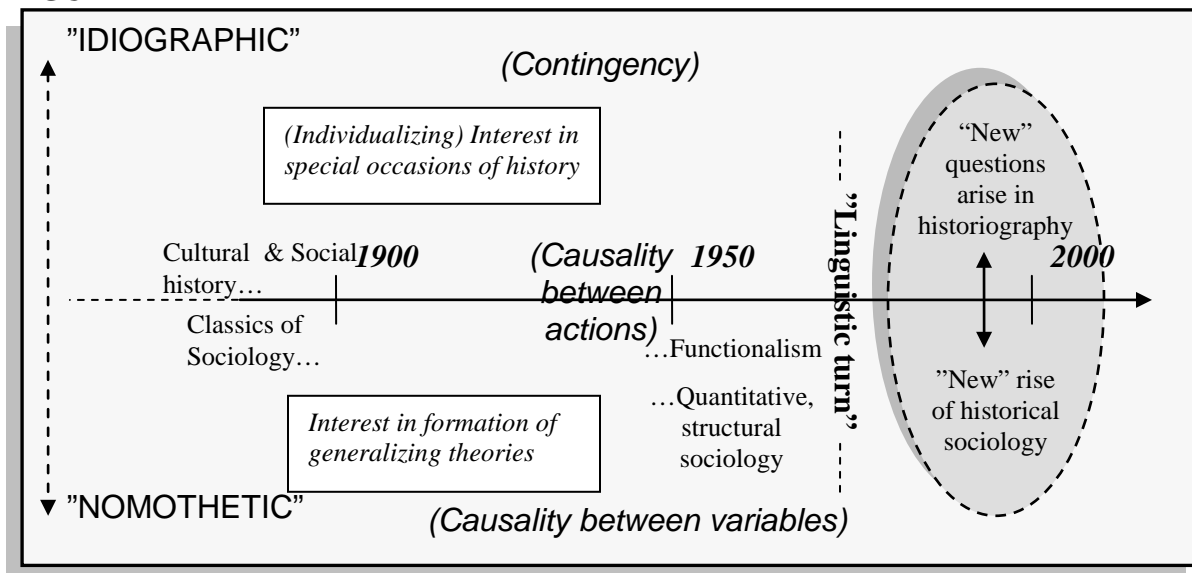
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<sup>2</sup> These three together forming the *nomothetic* sciences and operationalizing time and space differently than historiography (see Wallerstein 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Ikegami (2005) suggests that the interest in culture did also increase in the form of the critique of classical Marxism.

<sup>4</sup> Also because of other (yet entwined) influences, such as “radical sociology” from the late 1960s onward, the development of cultural studies within the humanities, and “the sciences of complexity” within the natural sciences (see Wallerstein 2000b, 30.)

FIGURE 1



### Theoretical viewpoints

One of the key elements in the emergence of new viewpoints in historical research has been the dispute over the extent to which history can actually represent "what really happened".

Whether or not a researcher can grasp something elementary from, say, something that happened a hundred years ago, is not up to him or her to decide, as there is always a peer group of other researchers in that particular research field who must be convinced by the documentation of sources and argumentative logic used in the research in question. On the other hand, all research has implicit theoretical expectations about the topic under investigation. As such, the theories embedded in the research questions and analytical tools should be explicitly confronted. (See Bryant 2000, 492–493; Sihvola 2003, 33–37.)

Generalizing and individualizing points of view in research have a lot to do with the role of theory in research. When theorizing is seen as embedded in the construction of the entire composition of research, the distinct division between idiographic and nomothetic approaches makes no sense. Nor is there much justification for keeping up the appearances between history and the social sciences: the individualizing and generalizing levels can be articulated and taken into account within the same research project by 1) using empirical sources and carefully situating them in the context in which they were once created, and 2) by providing an account of the sociology of science and by understanding the limitations of scientific objectivity. (Bryant 2000.)

**Table 1** (p. 6) illustrates some of the most typical and inherent problems related to the various research orientations. It is rare for all of these problems to appear simultaneously in practice, but the table clarifies the epistemological problems which pertain to either the individualizing or generalizing aims of research. In Table 1, the left column delineates the problems faced when the theoretical level is excluded from the research; the right column illustrates the inherent problems of research which fails to take contingency and context seriously. Many research orientations have taken note of these problems. The *Annalists*-school, for example, has been interested in taking simultaneous

yet divergent temporal durations<sup>5</sup> into account, and this in turn has had an influence on the development of conceptual history in its ambition to examine conceptual change as an expression of change in a larger context as well (e.g., Koselleck, Narr & Palonen 2000, 27).

**TABLE 1**

<b>Shortlist of Common Deformations in History and the Social Sciences</b>	
<b>HISTORY:</b>	<b>SOCIAL SCIENCES:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The prevalence of narratives that cling to the surface appearances in the events under review and, accordingly, yield evocative tableaux rather than explanatory accounts of sustaining processes and structures</li> <li>• A preference for striking vignettes and exotic detail at the expense of theoretically informed causal analysis</li> <li>• The intrusion of anachronistic moralizations and politicized evaluations, which disfigure and transform the past into either ‘heritage’ or thinly camouflaged grounds for the waging of contemporary ‘culture wars’</li> <li>• Simplistic models of motivation or invocations of common sense that implicitly rely upon the normative assumptions that hold sway within the historian’s own milieu</li> <li>• The uncritical borrowing of categories that were forged in social science circles and that are inadequately attuned to either the flux of history or the diversity of cultures</li> <li>• Tunnel-vision syndrome, wherein highly specialized principles of selection inadvertently endow their subjects with a misleading autonomy or salience by obstructing or neglecting the determinant relational contexts within which they originated and functioned</li> <li>• Narrative ‘overload’ as a commendable quest for balance and comprehensiveness which becomes degenerated into an indiscriminate empiricism wherein all that passes within purview finds an equal and jumbled inclusion</li> <li>• The tendency to conflate the merely consecutive with the truly consequential, an inclination intensified whenever representational functions are subordinated to or eclipsed by the tropistic dictates or a dramatizing sensationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The copious profusion of formal theories that fail to make contact with the real-life complexities of historical processes</li> <li>• The explanations and models that confuse the ephemeral properties of the present with invariant and essential determinants</li> <li>• The reified isolation of social forces as ‘independent’ variables from their constitutive relational contexts</li> <li>• Linear, physicalist models of causation that misrepresent the situational, reflexive logics of human agency</li> <li>• The purported laws which, if not trivial or tautological, override the meaning-imparting specificities of time and place through excessive abstraction</li> <li>• Chronic violations of chronology in the form of misleading accelerations and decelerations of historical pace or dubious periodizations occasioned by forced extensions or foreshortenings of temporal perspective</li> <li>• The strained transfer of concepts and theories that are laced with the normative evaluations and experiences of particular moments and sites of social praxis, and whose imposition on ‘other domains’ both violates the ontological integrity of those investigated and cloaks a self-delusional ratification of the framing ideologies that guide the cognitive interests of the investigators</li> </ul>

(gleaned from Bryant 2000, 511–512.)

<sup>5</sup> Fernand Braudel divided temporal durations in three categories: *longue durée* (e.g., climate changes); *conjuncture* (structural changes); and *événements* (human actions and events in history).

One part of the role of theory in research is related to how causality is understood. In history, causality is often referred to as “teleological-intentional”, whereas in the natural sciences it is seen as explaining the causality between X and Y (how the variables are related). If one wishes to comprehensively explain what has happened in history, one must take both of these forms of causality into consideration (Sihvola 2003, 38). The identification of the causal processes between action(s) and events in a larger context requires theorizing (Ruonavaara 2006, 34–35; cf. Figure 1, p. 5). Explaining human action also requires the identification of teleological-intentional causality, as without it, humans as intentional, thinking and feeling individuals would be left without any chance to influence their own actions.

In short, without theory it is difficult to carry out the kind of historical research that would be anything more than the mere description of historical events (Ruonavaara 2006, 42–47). And without history is virtually impossible to carry out social scientific research with the potential to take the temporality of action (which is one of the basic elements of thinking about teleological-intentional causality) into question (Bryant 1994; 2000). In the case of cultural policy studies, the collation of historical context and theoretical frame requires the careful study of politics and culture in relation to cultural policy as such.

## II) Politics and culture

For cultural policy as a research field, it is essential to examine the relationship between politics - and therefore policy - and culture. I will rely here on the analysis of ‘*politics*’ by Palonen (2003a) and the definition of ‘*culture*’ by Williams (1983). According to Palonen, policy is one of four dimensions of politics (Palonen 2003a). Considering culture, Williams (1988, 87) has stated that it is among the most complicated words in the English language. Thus, the relationship between these two concepts is not axiomatic. Yet one point seems clear: the *public sphere* has a notable role in the collation of culture and politics.

### Politics

Every contingent action includes a political dimension which links it to temporality and spatiality: human agents make choices in a context that is constructed in a specific time and place, and even the action itself has an inherent temporal dimension. As regards politics, we can refer to the concepts of politics-as-sphere (the spatial dimension) and politics-as-activity (the temporal dimension) (Palonen 2003a, 171). Both of these aspects are relevant for the study of cultural policy. Thus, in relation to policy as referring to the aspect of politics-as-sphere, I would like to highlight the role of human action and speak of the *diverse forms of politics* which influence the production and reproduction of ‘policy’.

Kari Palonen (2003a) has identified four aspects of ‘politics’: 1) *policy*, which refers to the regularizing aspect of politics; 2) *politicking*, referring to the performative aspect of politics; 3) *polity*, which implies a metaphorical space with specific possibilities and limits; 4) *politicization*, marking the opening of something as political. Thus, *policy* and *polity* refer to a spatial dimension of politics and form the limits - borders and regulations - of the polity-policy space, while *politicking* and *politicizing* refer to the activity by which politics is constituted. (Palonen 2003a, 171.)



“Policy has a teleological connotation, an orientation toward the future, which is considered to be a priority over the present state of affairs as well as the activity itself. In addition, policy has a normative character as a criterion in the selection of what should be realized among possible future.” Policy implies the coordination of acts and measures and regulates the inclusion and exclusion of activities. A relationship exists between policy and politicking in such a way that the aims of policy serve as instruments in the struggle for power in politicking. As such, politicking also presupposes the coordination of activities, although it “is not regulated by normative-teleological criteria or the priority of the future over the present” and refers to politics-as-activity, not politics-as-sphere. ”The key operations of politicking consist of choosing between different types and degrees of chances, which then lead to different styles of performances.” (Palonen 2003a, 175–179.)

The other spatial aspect of politics, polity, refers to “a temporalized space that has been politicized and *commonly accepted* as political, and that demarcates activity from that which is not accepted as political.” Thus, polity refers also to legitimation and illegitimation, and, ultimately, to power. There is a correlation between polity and politicizing, because politicizing can have an effect on polity formation: by politicizing<sup>6</sup> something, it can be “marked as political” - in other words, there is no polity before something has been politicized. (Palonen 2003a, 179–184.)

Based on Palonen, it is essential to understand the different dimensions of politics in the historical study of cultural policy. Palonen’s analysis clarifies the relationship between politics-as-action and politics-as-sphere, which is important for studies which have to pay attention to the relationship between individual actors and the *institutional* level. Politics-as-action (performed by individuals or groups of actors) and politics-as-sphere are inherently intertwined: the temporality and contingency of action are related to the structures which both transfer the limitations of action and open new possibilities for it (cf. the stability / change which has taken place over the course of history). Such an understanding of ‘policy’ does not exclude cultural institutions and, at the same time, includes the impact of action on policy-formation. However, there has to be some kind of *public sphere* in order for political action to take place. The political role of the public sphere becomes apparent especially if there is no commonly accepted, legitimated polity. For instance, although there was not yet a national polity in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Finland, one was already beginning to form within the public sphere and civil society: various civil associations (which constituted of individual actors) and communication (mainly newspapers and individual newspapermen) were politicizing Finnish culture (among other areas of society), aiming at the formation of national polity (See Sokka 2005, 15; Palonen 2003b, 481–483). Thus, by analysing the public sphere, the various mechanisms and specific and concrete actors through which culture and social are connected can be taken into account and studied in relation to the construction of cultural policy (cf. Bennett 2007, 32). Within cultural policy studies, Peter Duelund (2002), for one, has illustrated how social practices must be scrutinized as communicative actions in order to advance the understanding of cultural policies.

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<sup>6</sup> Politicizing requires that the *contingency* of a certain phenomenon is recognized; only after this recognition can it be opened for politicization.

## The public sphere

The public nature of political action relates politics to the public sphere (e.g., McGuigan 1996). The concept of the public sphere has been conceptualized in diverse ways, and a considerable amount of literature has been published on its significance. Many leading theorists have seen the public sphere as a crucial aspect of social action and as either maintaining stability or creating change in society (e.g., Arendt; Gramsci; Williams; Habermas; Foucault). These theorists have demonstrated that there are often diverse views represented in the public sphere, and that public action (e.g., politicizing or politicking) correlates to the outcome (e.g., polity or policy) of the struggle between them.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the narrowest definition of the public sphere is that put forth by Erving Goffman, in which a “public” emerges as the site of a temporary interaction between two individuals. “Public” can also be seen as a “sphere - actual-physical and/or imagined-virtual space - in which the actions of switching connections and decoupling take place” (Ikegami 2005, 23). In a more organized form, “a public can emerge on the basis of concrete institutionalized associational networks and communicative infrastructures that facilitate and sustain durable mechanisms for bringing interacting agents into the condition of a public. However, union rallies, the rituals of religious worship, and political demonstrations can also be seen as cases of more institutionalized publics than ‘Goffman publics’” (Ibid., 23). Thus, the public sphere is closely related to the civil society. McGuigan (2004, 51) has described this relationship as follows: “... public sphere - the political space for rational-critical debate that, in principle, has consequences for policy - is closely linked to the ... notion of civil society ... .”

One common feature in many writings about the public sphere is that it is not seen as a one, fixed sphere, but rather as multiple spheres. One of the most central theorists of the public sphere is Hannah Arendt. For her, the public sphere was a sphere of appearances, in which actions did not have to be homogenous; *a sphere in which diverse views, perspectives, and ideologies could exist* (see Palonen 1989, 28–29).<sup>8</sup> The public sphere and politics are related: politicizing and politicking are conducted in public, and there can be many simultaneous politicizing processes going on at any given time. Policies and polities are then commonly produced, reproduced or transformed as a consequence of these public, politicizings and politickings.

Understanding the public sphere as a place of rivalling tendencies is common, e.g., in social scientific studies of citizenship and cultural nationalism(s), in which the question of *who is allowed to legitimately act in the public sphere* is one of the most important items on the agenda. From this kind of viewpoint, research has to consider such things as the nature of the institutionalized spheres of politics and the discourses which are hegemonic and marginalized within them (Dahlgren 2006, 273–274; see also Duelund 2002 on the [Habermasian] public sphere as a forum for cultural struggle in relation to (State’s) cultural

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<sup>7</sup> Control over the public sphere is connected to the representation of ideologies (cf. Gramsci; Williams). Thus, there might be *differences* between different social systems *in the possibilities to act in public*. In addition to being visible in the comparisons between diverse contemporary societies, it can also be seen in the historical research on them (e.g., the differences between Finland in the 1960s and 1990s). Here, ‘public sphere’ refers to the Western understanding of public sphere.

<sup>8</sup> According to McGuigan (2004, 53–54), Habermas has described the public sphere in a rather similar way as “a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes)”. Of course, in history, the Habermasian ‘public sphere’ can only be referred to from ca. 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

policy). In addition, some authors (e.g., Cochran 1994, 142–155) have stressed the importance of symbolic action in relation to the public sphere; in addition to the concrete forms of executive political power present in the public sphere, how the production of the significant<sup>9</sup> is controlled in public is also important.<sup>10</sup>

The history of the processes in which certain meanings are attached to certain significant can be studied by elevating the public sphere to the foreground of research. For example, Eiko Ikegami (2005) has studied the public sphere historically in relation to individual actions and the structural level. There, politics cannot be bypassed. Indeed, the public sphere is also a crucial aspect of cultural policy studies. As McGuigan (1996, 22) has formulated: “That is what cultural policy is principally about, the conditions of culture, the material and, also, the discursive determinations in time and space of cultural production or consumption.” There are (usually) diverse orientations present for production and consumption in the public sphere, which the researcher should try to distinguish: it is not just a question of the instruments of cultural policy but also of *the kind of culture* being produced and reproduced by them; *who* has the means to produce and reproduce? Who is capable of influencing the formation of policies (and, of course, who is not)? These questions include the theoretical connotations of, e.g., the Gramscian question of hegemony, the Williamsian interest in social order in relation to culture, the Habermasian interest in the role of the public sphere, and the Foucaultian question of governmentality. The outcome of studying such approaches in *cultural policy studies* is dependent on how we define ‘culture’: if culture is defined narrowly as, say, ‘the arts’, the outcome of any analysis would be different than if it is seen as something broader and more profoundly enclosed in a social system as a whole.

### **‘Politics’ and ‘culture’ vis-à-vis ‘cultural policy’**

Politics does have an influence on cultural content, as is apparent in the discussions surrounding the nature of cultural policy studies. However, previous studies have not paid much attention to the prerequisites of the *historical formation of cultural policy as a spatial dimension of politics*. In this chapter, I will examine this phenomenon in relation to Williams’ conceptualization of culture and reflect it with cultural policy studies as a field of research.

Conceptualizations of culture have been important for the development of cultural policy studies. According to Williams (1983, 207), *culture as a realized signifying system is closely related to the social system, but not equivalent to it*. As a result, culture is also related to politics (cf. the politicizing and politicking of culture as one dimension of social action in the public sphere). The signifying system has to be reproduced in the public sphere if it is to survive (Williams 1983, 184), and thus corresponds with, amongst other things, policy-formation. According to what I have proposed earlier in this article, there are usually diverse views represented in the public sphere, which correlate the content of culture with the outcome of the struggle between these views. Thus, culture is not just linked to the public sphere, but - through it - also to social order and hegemony. Yet the contingency of action enables change to take place. Because of the inherent interconnectedness of politics-as-action and politics-as-sphere, the institutionalization of culture can be related to the

<sup>9</sup> Significant = marks, symbols, products, which represent certain idea(s).

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Williams, for instance, identifies the act of attaching meanings to a certain significant *in a social action* (Pala 1998, 246; see Williams 1983).

(re)production of cultural meanings in social action.

In cultural policy studies, cultural policy has tended to be contextualized in relation to those forms of culture which have been deemed central to a certain society. The field of *critical* cultural policy studies has not been content to merely identify the central cultural aspects of a given society, but has also attempted to identify those on the margin (e.g., Lewis & Miller 2003). The abovementioned theorists (Gramsci, Williams, Habermas, Foucault) have been influential in this shift towards critically balancing the implications of cultural policy (McGuigan 1996, 12–29). As such, the examination of the historical formation of cultural policies has been seen as one of the most important questions for the future of cultural policy studies as a research field (Scullion & García 2005, 117–118, 122–124).

Without policy orientation in research, it would be difficult to grasp the *established political practices* (e.g., policies, including the allocation of material resources) through which politics can have an influence on culture (McGuigan 2003, 29). Indeed, this has been the dominant argument since the 1990s: McGuigan has identified the beginnings of this discussion on the uneasy relationship of cultural studies and cultural policy studies as located in Tony Bennett's statement "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies" (1992). Bennett (1999, 380–381) himself has related it to Stuart Cunningham (1991), who emphasized the value of the orientation of cultural policy in the field of cultural studies, seeing policy-oriented research as better equipped than cultural studies *per se* to answer questions related to access, equity, empowerment, and the divination of opportunities.

Culture acquires its dynamics through language and social action, and the questions of power and communication become attached to culture through them. This was evident to many of the classic theorists, for example Gramsci and Williams (see Pala 1998). I will concentrate here on Williams' conception of culture in order to explicate that the social and the political are related to culture, and, furthermore, to illustrate the implicit role of policy in Williams' own definitions, which have been influential in cultural policy studies. Williams (1983, 207–208) avoids the problem of attaching either too wide (a way of life) or too narrow (arts; high culture) a definition of *culture* by defining it *as a realized signifying system* and paying attention to the material, social and political in relation to the production and reproduction of culture:

“... the strength of its [culture's] relational range of meanings, from 'whole way of life' to 'states of mind' and 'works of art', is often in practice its weakness, since its insistence on interrelations can be made passive, or altogether evaded, by its simultaneous possibilities of too wide a generality and too narrow a specialization. To prevent this, by stressing the centrality of its type of definition, we can specify and reinforce the concept of culture as *a realized signifying system*. ... To make this clear, we can distinguish a signifying system from, on the one hand, other kinds of systemic social organization, and, on the other hand, more specific signal systems ... Thus, it is always necessary to be able to distinguish economic systems, political systems and generational (kinship and family) systems, and to be able to discuss these in their own terms. ... We have still to be able to discuss a social system in the most general and inclusive terms. It would be wrong to reduce it to the signifying system alone, for this would make all human actions and

relationships mere functions of signification and, in doing so, radically diminish them.”

It can thus be suggested that there is an implicit policy orientation in Williams’ definition of culture: the *political system* should be studied *in its own terms* in relation to the more general signifying system in order to understand it in relation to culture<sup>11</sup>. And, in addition to studying the connection between politics and culture through certain cultural products as significant that reflect the larger social system and its embedded hierarchies and hegemonies,<sup>12</sup> the political system as such should also be studied in this respect.

Williams’ ‘culture’ seems to refer neither to “a whole way of life” (unlike, e.g., Bennett 1999, 381 has suggested) nor to “art”. It is a definition of culture that is not limited to certain perpetual meaning(s) and that allows both the material and the social context to be taken into account. As a result of Williams’ definition of ‘culture’, the socio-cultural context and various dimensions of politics do have an influence on culture. Williams (1983) did not concentrate on cultural policies as such, but his recognition of the interconnectedness of culture as a realized signifying system and “other kinds of systemic social organizations” did provide a preliminary platform for the development of the field of cultural policy studies. And, as Williams himself (e.g., 1983, 33) stated, any changes in this frame can best (and only) be seen through historical examination.

### III) An historical view on the construction of cultural policy

In reviewing the dominant literature in the field, it becomes evident that the historical study of cultural policy must use primary sources through which the research topic in question can be lined to a particular time and society. Contextualization highlights the contingency of action in relation to the particular circumstances in which it occurred. This has been one of the most dominant areas of historiography: the diverse possibilities for action are revealed by carefully studying the historical sources which have documented actions which have taken place in the past. On the other hand, the critical study of (the production and reproduction of) cultural policy is impossible without first theorizing and conceptualizing politics and culture. In addition, without theorizing it is difficult to bring forth the relationship between individual actions and the structures that surround - and at the same time enable - them.

Due to the increased interest in questions related to culture, historians have been theoretically inspired by the social sciences, and, at the same time, many social scientists have focused more on history, contingency and social change. This has resulted in rapprochement between the idiographic and nomothetic research orientations: theorizing and individualizing can be applied in the same research. This article proposes a point of view which corroborates some of the findings of previous work in this field. However, previous studies dealing with the relationship between historiography and the social sciences (see p. 1) have concentrated on the theorization of politics, or culture as such, and have not been all that interested in the theorization of historical study of cultural policy research. I will conclude by 1) illustrating a framework (**Figure 2** on the following page)

<sup>11</sup> For instance, examining certain *policy* within and in relation to a larger cultural context.

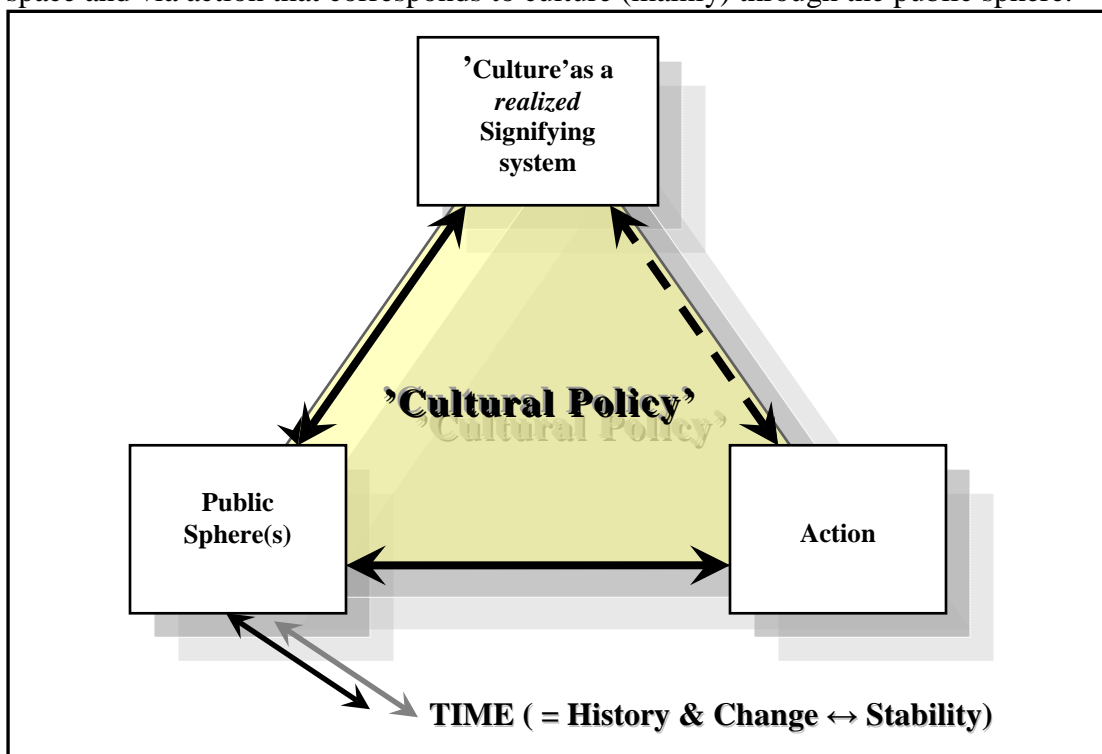
<sup>12</sup> This has been the common approach in cultural studies.

for the historical study of cultural policy, and 2) by explicating some possible starting points for research carried out within this framework (Table 2, p. 14).

In Figure 2, the three aspects of cultural policy formation which were introduced in Chapter II of this paper - politics, public sphere, and culture as a signifying system - are presented as constitutive of one another. The temporal dimension of politics, politics-as-action (the "making of," or reproduction of polity or the content of policy) is most notably present in the relationship between action and the public sphere(s), and culture is related to action via communication in the public sphere. There are also some cultural features which need not be communicated socially in order to become attached to acting individuals (e.g. the material products of culture). When, however, culture is understood as a realized signifying system, spheres in which certain signs (e.g., language, pictures, symbols, works of art, etc.) have the potential to become socially signified are of uttermost importance.

On the one hand, culture sets the limits for action (policy and polity are formed in relation to culture, which has been (re)produced over the centuries) and transfers them over time; on the other hand, as a signifying system, culture itself opens possibilities for action which can alter culture. Thus, to large extent, the content of cultural policy is produced and reproduced within the framework of Figure 2. In addition, we should bear in mind that there are a number of other factors - e.g., markets and monetary system - which influence the content of policies.<sup>13</sup>

**FIGURE 2:** The production and reproduction of cultural policy take place in time and space and via action that corresponds to culture (mainly) through the public sphere.



<sup>13</sup> However, also here action and public sphere should be taken into account (see Baker 2002, 159–160).

Within the frame presented in Figure 2, it is possible to grasp the diverse content (both legitimated and marginalized arguments) which has been related to 'culture' and 'cultural policy' in history. Sensitivity towards historical socio-political context can bring forth elements which might otherwise have been forgotten or actively marginalized after the formation of a given policy. As a consequence of this sensitivity to history, it becomes possible to consider how a specific dominant view of culture has been connected to a certain policy and to examine the development of that policy's instruments and the politicking which has taken place within it (cf. exclusion / inclusion strategies).

Based on the framework I have delineated in Figure 2 and in conclusion of the discussion in this article, I propose the use of the analytical starting points for the critical study of cultural policies histories found in Table 2 below. Table 2 is also a response to Bryant's critique, which was presented here in Table 1 (p. 6). To avoid the problems outlined in Table 1, both time and space should be taken seriously in research:

“ ... all useful descriptions of social reality are necessarily simultaneously 'historical' (that is, they take into account not only the specificity of the situation but the continual and endless changes in the structures under study as well as in their envioning structures) and 'social scientific' (that is, they search for structural explanations of the *longue durée*, the explanations for which, however, are not and cannot be eternal) ... In such a reunified (and eventually redivided) social science, it would not be possible to assume a significant divide between economic, political, and sociocultural arenas ... And we would have to be very careful about the 'we' and the 'other'.” (Wallerstein 2000b, 34.)

**TABLE 2**

<b>Analytical Starting Points for the Historical Study of Cultural Policies</b>
1. The theoretical (and social) presumptions that are implicitly present in the research composition should be written out.
2. The analysis of historical sources should primarily be reflected against theories, not vice versa. Otherwise the theories used tend to define what can be “found” in the source material.
3. Structures and long-lasting processes should be identified in relation to individual occasions in history.
4. In addition to adopting linear causality in historical research, human action should be examined as contingent and attached to a certain social, political and cultural context .
5. Concepts, notions, and ideas should be studied as historical phenomena which are bound to specific contexts.
6. The public sphere should be examined as momentous for human action, social relations and their outcome.
7. Social relations and social order should be considered as historical phenomena which are possible to alter.
8. Cultural diversity (diverse forms and contents of culture) within a certain society should be analyzed historically in order to bring forth the power

relations and hegemonic / marginal conceptions of culture within a certain period.

Due the temporality of contingent action, the diverse conceptualization of certain concepts (or the signifying of certain significant) must be reproduced in order to endure. This means, in short, that the possibility for change (even in the most stable of circumstances, or in circumstances in which there is no space for diverse views<sup>14</sup>) is always present and only becomes visible when viewed in the context of a longer time scale and understandable when viewed within a broader cultural framework. This is the core idea of Figure 2 and Table 2. Cultural policies are formed through public action, within a certain culture, and over the course of history, just like any other political spheres.

Cultural policy, which located in the middle of the triangle in Figure 2, can indeed be analyzed just like any of the other formations, concepts or products which are produced in a particular cultural framework as a consequence of acting in the public sphere, but the policy dimension also indicates that one part of the analysis should be *how policy itself is a means towards certain ends*, which, if realized, evoke changes or stabilization in cultural circumstances. Cultural policy has a teleological connotation and normative character (cf. Palonen 2003a). As such, cultural policy studies should consider policy dichotomously, as outlined in Figure 2, as attempting to understand 1) *how policy itself represents*, e.g., *power* (and 'culture'), and 2) *how the conditions of culture are formed by policy implications*. McGuigan (1996, 1–7, 28) seems to be correct in emphasizing that cultural policy should be considered in a broader context than its being a mere instrument through which the allocation of resources for "high culture" are controlled: "cultural policy is about the politics of culture in the most general sense: it is about the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meanings."

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. totalitarian societies.



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